

An opportunity for something new

More than 60 years ago, a local man who had a true entrepreneurial spirit and what absolutely had to be a love of music and the industry itself built a live music dance hall and roller skating rink in Camas.

What a sight it must have been nestled along the bank of the Washougal River. Constructed with sturdy fir logs and accented with a dramatic river rock fire place, wagon wheel chandeliers, shiny dance floor and main stage, Pat Mason's Wagon Wheel Park opened to the public in 1948. For a decade, it served as a hub of social life and activities. Today, it's fun to imagine how that building must have come to life each Saturday night as hundreds of people packed the venue to dance and listen to live music provided by the likes of Willie Nelson, Tex Ritter, Stan Kenton and George Bruns.

And the building continued to serve as a venue for local entertainment as it was transformed by new owners into a bowling alley that also became a place where memories were made.

After a story about some of the building's early history and upcoming destruction ran in the March 6 edition of the Post-Record, many readers shared their own remembrances on the newspaper's website.

Commenter Darrell Williams may have summed it up best when he said: "This is a building that led a very hard life but held memories for so many individuals. It will be truly missed as an iconic landmark for the Camas-Washougal area."

On Saturday, the old Wagon Wheel Park/Riverside Bowl building will go up in flames as part of a local fire department practice burn. While the building has certainly been a landmark in the community, in this case its ultimate demise was practically unavoidable as it had been so neglected during the last decade that it eventually became an eyesore in the community — far from the source of pride it once was so many years ago.

But, once the smoke has cleared and the ashes and debris left from this old building have been hauled away, what will be left is a clean slate. It will be an opportunity for someone with the same passion Pat Mason had, and create something that will be used and enjoyed by the community in the decades to come.

What will that be? How long will that take? Only time will tell.

— Heather Acheson